

Theology vol 85

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

BEFORE THE LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL

On FRIDAY, *April* 19, 1793.

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Die Sabbati, 20^o Aprilis, 1793.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday, in the Abbey-Church, Westminster; and that he be desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

GEORGE ROSE, *Cler' Parliamentor'*.



A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED
BEFORE THE LORDS SPIRITUAL
AND TEMPORAL,
IN THE
ABBAY CHURCH OF ST. PETER, WESTMINSTER,
On FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 1793:
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED
By his Majesty's Special Command
FOR A
G E N E R A L F A S T
AND
H U M I L I A T I O N.

BY RICHARD *Beadon K.*
LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER.

L O N D O N:
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M,DCC,XCIII.



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S E R M O N, &c.

R O M A N S, chap. xi. ver. 21.

IF GOD SPARED NOT THE NATURAL BRANCHES, TAKE
HEED, LEST HE ALSO SPARE NOT YOU.

WHATEVER difficulty there may be in affigning
a satisfactory reason for the diversity of stile ob-
servable in the compositions of different nations, the
fact itself will be readily admitted by every one competent
to form a judgement of it. The stile of the eastern na-
tions, not to mention that of any others, is now, and
has been in all ages, highly figurative, abounding in strong
metaphors, and apposite allegories. Thus David com-
B pares

compares the Jewish nation to a vineyard, and God, its especial governor, to an husbandman. He represents the Almighty as having *brought a vine out of Egypt, planted it, prepared room for it, caused it to take root, till it filled the land, and the hills were covered with the shadow of it*; and afterwards, on account of its unfruitfulness, as having neglected this vineyard, *broken down the hedge thereof, and suffered the wild beasts of the field to devour it**. Isaiah, in the same stile, speaks of God as possessing *a vineyard in a fruitful hill, as having fenced it, gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, as looking that it should bring forth grapes, and behold it brought forth wild grapes*. The Prophet then explains the allegory—*the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgement, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. †*

Though the Christian dispensation is of a more comprehensive nature than the Jewish, yet our Saviour chose to express himself in similar terms. *I am the vine, and my father is the husbandman. ‡* And again, *I am the vine, ye are the branches. §* St Paul, in the chapter before us, extends and diversifies the allusion, by introducing the
idea

* Psalm lxxx.

† Isaiah, ch. v.

‡ John xvi. 1.

§ John xv. 5.

idea of grafting, and converting the vine into the olive-tree. The Jews were originally admitted into that extraordinary rank, which they held in the favour of God, not in consequence of their own merit, but for the purpose of promoting a peculiar end in the scheme of Providence, established for the government of the world. Unmoved by the forbearance and long-suffering of the Almighty, they were at length degraded from this high privilege, of which in so many signal instances they had shewn themselves unworthy; and by that means made room for the adoption of the Gentiles, who were reconciled to God, through the merits of his blessed Son, and re-admitted, on the gracious terms of the Gospel, to the hopes and promise of immortality. This dispensation the Apostle beautifully illustrates by the metaphor above-mentioned. He compares the rejection of the Jews to cutting off the barren and unfruitful branches of a tree, and the admission of the Gentiles into the Church of God to foreign grafts, that had the privilege of being inserted in their stead, and thereby *partaking of the root and fatness of the true olive-tree*; and from hence he addresses himself to both Jews and Gentiles in many excellent moral and religious precepts, in order to suppress the unreasonable contentions that subsisted between them. The propriety and justice of his observations could hardly fail of having

a powerful effect in humbling the arrogance of the conceited favourites of heaven, and extinguishing the growth of that envy and jealousy, which they entertained against the nations, whom they looked upon as intruders into God's covenant : whilst at the same time, his admonitions were equally well calculated to mortify that pride and contempt, which their late elevation had infused into the minds of the heathen converts towards their rejected brethren, and to bring them to a just sense of the conditions, upon which they might expect a continuance of the divine favour, so freely, and on their part so undeservedly, bestowed upon them. “ *If some of the branches, saith the apostle, be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree, boast not thyself against the branches, but remember, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest but by faith ; be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.**

The doctrine of the apostle, in this part of his epistle, is evidently to be understood in a political sense, as addressed not to persons, but nations. For as the only distinction,

* Rom. 11. 17.—21.

inction, in this first age of Christianity, was betwixt Jews and Gentiles, the rebukes and admonitions given to the latter, are directed to them as an incorporated society of Christian converts ; and the advice given them was, not to indulge a petulant spirit of despising a nation, to whom they had succeeded in God's favour and covenant ; not to reproach them with ingratitude and defection, but rather to look to their own ways ; not to become proud, careless, and secure, in consequence of their present advancement but to be cautious and vigilant, lest they themselves should fall into the same sins of infidelity and disobedience ; not to be high-minded, but fear ; and, if God spared not the natural branches, to take the greater heed for that reason, lest he also should not spare them.

The practical inference resulting from this view of the divine dispensations, and the whole scope of St. Paul's reasoning, is plainly this ; that God, in the promulgation of his laws, proposes to single persons and to collective societies different motives to obedience, and that national virtue and wickedness are generally rewarded and punished in this life. This observation indeed is not only true in fact, as appears from the different sanctions of the Law and the Gospel, but it is necessary from the nature of
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of things that it should be so. For as, on the one hand, it is plainly impossible, that nations and communities, which can only subsist in this world, should be rewarded or punished in their public capacity in a life to come ; so it is no less necessary, on the other hand, for the vindication of God's honour, and the manifestation of his Providence, that kingdoms and states, which have dishonoured their Creator, and subverted the laws of religion and morality, written in the hearts of rational beings, should, as such, be made examples of his vengeance. For personal offences there is appointed a personal judgment, when *the tares* shall be separated from *the wheat*, and *the goats* from *the sheep* ; but national iniquity requires a national visitation, and is accordingly often punished by great and visible judgments. But without having recourse to these extraordinary interpositions, such, and so admirable is the constitution of this world, that it has a mechanical power, as it were, to accomplish the ends, for which it was established. The Laws of the Creator, in the moral as well as in the natural world, execute themselves. Nature generally avenges its own wrongs ; and nothing is more certain, than that sin is constantly big with sorrow, and that a people, who *plow iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same.**

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Job. iv. 8.

For want of due attention to the nature of the Jewish œconomy, it has been thought extraordinary by some persons, that Moses should enforce obedience to the laws he established for that people by motives altogether temporal, at least without any express declaration of the rewards and punishments of a future state. But, though the mission of the Jewish lawgiver was unquestionably of divine appointment, and proved to be so by *signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*, yet the immediate and express object of it was, not only to deliver the twelve tribes from the tyranny of Egyptian slavery, and to fulfil a temporal promise made to Abraham, that his seed should possess the land of Canaan; but to establish in the world a theocracy, and to exhibit to the Jews, and through them to the surrounding nations, a series of full and sensible proofs, that *the Lord God Almighty, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, was one God, and that besides him there was none other*. The institution therefore being chiefly designed to destroy idolatry, and to keep the Jews in their political character obedient to God as their temporal sovereign, it was necessary that the sanctions should be speedy, and visible in their effects, as well to animate and support those wonderful exertions, requisite for the deliverance, the settlement, and the arrangement and conduct of the whole civil polity of a people, placed in circumstances so extraordinary,

traordinary, as that all the idolatrous nations might know, that the God of Israel alone *ruled in the kingdoms of men*, and gave them to *whomsoever he would*; and that, from observing the punishment frequently inflicted on the Jews for the sin of apostacy, they might learn to *tremble and fear before him*. The promises and threats of a future state would have been too remote in their accomplishment, and consequently too slow in their efficacy upon minds, influenced chiefly by the immediate operation of present good or evil.

The Israelites moreover were addressed not in their character of individuals, but in their collective capacity of a body politic. And, as in such a capacity, they could feel the effects of their behaviour in no other manner, than in national prosperity or calamities, so the laws enjoined for their observance could of course be sanctioned only by rewards and punishments confined to this life. They were besides, for the wisest reasons, destined for the turbulence of arms, and the bloody scenes of conquest; for the execution of the wrath of God on idolatrous nations, with all the severity of unrelenting justice, and all the terror of long-provoked vengeance. How far the disposition of mind, requisite for acting with vigour a part so offensive to the feelings of humanity, could be raised or kept up by motives of a spiritual tendency, will be best determined by

by an appeal to the Gospel, and the temper of mind there required of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Nor let the difference, so visible in these different dispensations, be thought to imply any degree of inconsistency in the character of the Deity, any contradiction in the methods of his providence. God, with consummate wisdom, ever adapts his mode of administration to the nature of the end proposed. The reasons assignable for the temporal sanctions of the Mosaic institutions have been already considered. From these institutions the precepts of the Gospel are peculiarly distinguished, by the circumstance of having no direct reference to any particular form of civil establishment. They are of general and universal obligation, addressed to all mankind without distinction, and to each man in his own individual character. They are practicable under every mode of human government; no farther connected with political measures, than these latter may be found in particular cases to have respect to considerations of a moral or religious nature. And as their main object is placed beyond the limits of this world, the motives urged for our compliance with them, are very properly founded on our interest in a state of future existence.

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Nor again can this reasoning be applied to justify an inference, that under the Christian dispensation, virtue and vice have but an inconsiderable influence on the state and complexion of our temporal interests. From the first establishment of Christianity, down to the present period, history presents us with, alas! too many proofs of the destructive effects of vice and impiety, exhibited in the ruin of empires, once flourishing, and raised to power and eminence by the genuine influence of religion, and the natural efficacy of virtue. This truth, confirmed by uniform experience, is founded also on the very nature of those laws, which are appointed by Providence for directing the events of this world. Valour, wisdom, industry, and œconomy, are requisites indispensably necessary to the support of national grandeur. But in the midst of a general depravity of manners, there is little scope, and still less encouragement or inclination for the exercise of these virtues, which will be found repugnant to modes more fashionable, and incompatible with pursuits more consonant to the prevailing taste. Immorality is ever attended with dissipation, and a disregard of the means, which can alone secure the permanent happiness of this life, or lay any certain foundation for its comforts and conveniencies. Sunk in vicious indulgences, or occupied in trivial and frivolous pursuits,

pursuits, the mind becomes averse from all serious employment, and unqualified for any manly effort; and irreligion undermines the very foundation of true courage, a rational confidence in the protection of God.

One of the greatest statesmen, as well as one of the first philosophers, that ever did honour to human genius, ascribes the immense extent and power of the Roman empire to the piety of his countrymen, in conciliating the favour and protection of a divine superintending Providence.* And if any farther evidence were necessary to confirm the observation of a judge so competent in the case, an appeal to history would be decisive and satisfactory. For it is true in fact, that the relaxation of Roman discipline, and the consequent decay of political energy, may be dated from the attack made upon its religious principles by the atheistical doctrines of the sect of Epicurus. From this period, the passions, too powerful to be restrained by the feeble barriers of human laws, were opposed by no principle, of sufficient force to correct their deviations, or to check their violence.

Happy would it have been for a modern great empire to have paid some regard to an example in this instance

* Cic. Orat. de Harusp. Responsis.

so applicable ; to have derived instruction from a precedent so awful in its consequences, and so memorable in the annals of mankind. But what wisdom, what moderation was to be expected in the wild projects of visionary theorists, insolently determined to overturn every superstructure raised on the solid foundation laid by their ancestors, and affecting to hold in contempt the experience of past ages ! What policy could be looked for in the councils of mock legislators, whose greatest pride it is to insult and trample under foot all that is important in human society, all that is venerable and sacred in the estimation of man ! What respect for the laws of humanity, what regard even for common decency, was likely to dignify the conduct of usurpers, with hands dyed in blood, and hearts steeled for oppression, unmoved equally at the distress of innocence, and the humiliating spectacle of fallen Majesty ! Infatuated and remorseless people ! The measure of your iniquity seems at length to be full ; the hour of retribution is coming fast upon you ! *Drunk with the blood* of your fellow citizens, you have dared to spread your ravages abroad ; rousing the surrounding nations, in justice to themselves, and the common cause of humanity, to confederate against you, in order to execute (we hope there is no presumption, no want of charity in the expression,) to execute the wrath of God on your devoted heads !

Deeply

Deeply interested in the public and general consequences of these events, it was impossible for this country to remain long, either unconcerned, or inactive spectators of such a scene. Our public measures had been uniformly and wisely directed for some years to the establishment of a lasting peace, and to the enlargement and security of our trade and manufactures ; and the Almighty had blessed the wisdom of our Councils by a prosperity unprecedented in the annals of commercial States. Despising the little intrigues, which national jealousy might have dictated, or present utility have recommended, we did not from a narrow view to our own interests, or from a resentful spirit of retaliation, foment the internal distractions of a people, who had not been accustomed to shew the same moderation in our political embarrassments. Our magnanimity shines in a still more conspicuous light, gloriously displayed as it has been, and still is, in the relief of numberless unfortunate individuals, who, torn from their native connections, and driven from the bosom of their own country, have found a safe and honourable asylum on our more hospitable shores. Under these circumstances, without any provocation on our part, without even the semblance of any just complaint on the part of our enemies, we have been forced into hostilities for the protection of our allies, for the maintenance of solemn treaties, and for
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the preservation of the tranquillity of Europe. If it had been possible for us to be unmoved by these interesting considerations, yet regard alone for the security of our own political existence must have excited our indignation at the open avowal of doctrines, levelled at the very fundamental principles of our happy constitution. What rank we are to hold in the general system of Europe ; to what extent we may be allowed to enlarge our commercial influence, or exert our national importance, are not the questions we are at present called upon to determine. The only question to be now decided, upon the principles of these speculative reformers, is reduced to a much more summary form---whether in a national capacity, as a free and independent state, we have a right to exist at all ?

Thus, after all the forbearance that true policy could admit, or even humanity recommend, have we been compelled to abandon our well-concerted plans of industry and œconomy, and forcibly drawn from the bosom of peace, into the unwelcome calamities and horrors of war. And having made a solemn appeal to the God of battles, we presume to implore his blessing on our arms with greater confidence, because we approach his presence in full reliance on the justice of our cause. But let us not hastily encourage too lofty pretensions, or too securely rely on the integrity of our designs, in the conflict that now calls forth
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our reluctant exertions. To what degree our enemies may have deserved the displeasure of Heaven, is not for us to determine ; it is our duty to enquire, what grounds we have to hope for its favour. This is a consideration well qualified to humble that presumption, which might otherwise be apt to arise in our minds, upon a comparative estimate of our own merits with those of our adversaries. In the contentions of mankind we behold indeed, not unfrequently, most clear and awful manifestations of the arm of Omnipotence, directing the events, and deciding the issue. But these occasional interpositions of Providence must not be supposed to have reference only to those particular emergencies, in which they seem to be, or really are, more immediately displayed, and which for that reason are often, though inconsiderately, thought to decide with all the authority and precision of a definitive sentence of justice. It is surely more rational to consider them on a wider and more extensive scale, as connected with the grand scheme of God's general government of the universe ; and in this view of things, it is perfectly consistent with our notions of impartial justice, to conceive the Almighty inflicting vengeance on one guilty people, by the instrumentality of another still more guilty. The chastisement of guilt only is intended, and not any decision on the relative merits of the parties engaged in the conflict.

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The inference from this reasoning is, at the present juncture, peculiarly applicable to our case. All the circumstances that can justify an appeal to arms, conspire to recommend our cause to the protection of Heaven; and our enemies, to their various other enormities, have added the impious folly of disclaiming the belief and acknowledgment of a God, who over-ruleth the world. Shall we then in such a situation, grow confident; and, secure in self-complacence, presume with certainty on the divine assistance in support of our cause? God forbid! The uniform experience of past ages condemns the folly of such a disposition, always prompted by arrogance, and often leading to disappointment. But without building any hopes favourable to ourselves on the degeneracy of other nations, let us rather review, lament, and reform our own. Upon these occasions of extraordinary general exertion, a very slight attention to the instability of all human power will shew the prudence, no less than the duty, of examining into the true state of our national character, with respect to the great essentials of religion and morality. And if we enter, as we ought, upon a dispassionate enquiry into this subject, we shall discover, it is to be feared, too many defects, too many vices, which inattention alone could have admitted amongst a people, professing to be influenced by
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the principles, and governed by the precepts of the pure religion of Jesus Christ.

It is high time that we awake out of this slumber, this fatal lethargy of the soul. It is high time that we reform those moral abuses, which have taken too deep root amongst us, which have branched out with wild luxuriance in every direction, and in superfluous abundance borne fruit, equally disgraceful to the individual, and destructive to the community. Were it only out of gratitude and respect to a long succession of ancestors, who have transmitted down to us, in the British Constitution, the noblest monument of political wisdom, ever reared by the efforts of human genius, let us strive to emulate their virtues, which now shine illustrious in effects, honourable to their memory, and highly important to our interests. Let us imitate their zeal in the support of religion and true liberty ; then, and then only, may we hope, that the wisdom of our councils, the unanimity and alacrity of our public exertions, and the vigour of our arms, will become instruments, under the direction of Providence, for controuling those unprovoked usurpations, which demand, with so much justice, our present interference. Let us by a strict obedience to the divine laws shew ourselves faithful in the service of the

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Almighty ;

Almighty ; we may then hope to be thought not unworthy means in his hands of avenging both the blood of a murdered Sovereign, and the unexampled sufferings of his captive family, of protecting the violated rights of civil society, and of securing to religion a shield of defence against the desperate and undisguised attacks of infidelity and atheism.

In obedience to the commands of our earthly Sovereign, we have this day with great propriety applied ourselves in Prayer and Fasting to seek the protection of *the King of Kings*, and *Lord of Hosts*, that by his aid we may be able to triumph over our enemies, and *put to confusion all that hate us*. But we must first *put away the evil of our doings* from before his eyes ; it cannot be expected that he will vouchsafe to *dwell in the tents of wickedness*, or strengthen our arms in the defence of our liberties, whilst we fondly continue in slavery to our sins. Let us therefore shew the sincerity of our prayers for the welfare of our country, by cleansing it of those pollutions, which render us *vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction*, not the objects of favour and protection. “ *At what instant, saith God, by the mouth of his prophet, I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation, against whom I*
have

*have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.** Let us attend in time to these gracious warnings, these solemn declarations of the severity, as well as goodness of God; and if the latter is not effectual to lead us, let the former rouse us to repentance and amendment of life. Let us bring forth such fruit, as may be expected from a vine of God's plantation; let virtue and piety, peaceableness and submission, good will and charity, adorn all our branches. Let us discern, at least *in this our day, the things that belong unto our peace*, lest that hand, which *spared not the natural branches*, be at length provoked also to *spare not us*.

* Jeremiah, Ch. 18. 7.—10.

F I N I S.

